

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
March 20 & 21, 2007**

The regular meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9 A.M., on March 20, 2007, in Room 1D2 of the Transportation Building in Olympia, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Ford, Ed Barnes, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Carol Moser, Dan O'Neal and Dale Stedman.

MINUTES APPROVAL

It was moved by Commissioner Stedman and seconded by Commissioner Forner to approve the minutes of February 13 & 14, 2007 meeting with requested changes by Commissioner O'Neal. The motion passed unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT BOARD (TIB) PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Steve Gorcester, Executive Director, TIB, shared that in 2004 the agency took a major step forward by pursuing development of a web interactive performance management dashboard that accesses data from their project database that displays financial, project and staff performance data in real time. This business dashboard has been key to restoring financial stability to an agency that was in dire need of a new approach. TIB's business dashboard responds to the Governor's GMAP directive requiring all state agencies to implement performance management programs. In response to this new way of doing business, the Legislature invested in TIB after previously declaring no confidence. During the 2005 legislative session, the chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee cited the quality of TIB's project and performance information in support of proposed transportation legislation. A new grant program was established, providing TIB with additional capital funding.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN INLAND PACIFIC HUB

Glenn Miles, Executive Director, Spokane Regional Transportation Council (SRTC) and Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO), explained that the Inland Pacific Hub represents a two state planning effort that will analyze the capacity for development of a globally connected, multi-modal transportation gateway, and the potential economic impact such a gateway would have on the region's economy. The plan will identify and prioritize the region's future critical transportation infrastructure requirements necessary to drive economic growth.

Litisha Hill, Special Projects Coordinator, AVISTA, emphasized that transportation is a critical investment for current and future economic growth in the Inland Pacific Region. According to research truck traffic on all major roads into the region has doubled over the past decade. WSDOT's research indicates that air cargo shipments into Spokane International Airport have also increased dramatically over the last decade. Barge and rail shipments are increasing at a similar rate.

National trade experts predict a continued surge in international trade over the next decade. Initial research indicates that many shipping companies and freight forwarders will be looking to inland ports for handling much of the new growth.

The Inland Pacific Region, with Spokane and Kootenai Counties as the hub, currently has much of the basic infrastructure needed to support an inland port facility. Valuable regional assets already exist that are potential connections which can be used as leverage to form an attractive, efficient multi-modal system in the Inland Pacific Region.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Reema Griffith, Executive Director, Transportation Commission, shared highlights of the House budget proposal impacting the Commission. She relayed that the Commission received its base budget only, with no funding for compensation, one FTE and funds requested for consultants. The TNB was appropriated \$1.3 million, with no appropriation of \$10 million to buy down the tolls. The House budget does contain a proviso – directing the Commission to set tolls at \$1.50 for ETC users until the old bridge is reopened. TNB Program B budget for management overhead costs indicates 22 FTEs. The FTE's would be directly connected to the TNB tolling effort and not to any other project according to statute. It is assumed that there will not be a ferry fare increase until October 2008, at which time there would be a 2.5 percent increase into the out years. The funding gap will be filled largely by funds from the multi modal fund (flexible transportation fund). This funding process is not entirely clear. The TIP program did not receive any funding. She provided an overview of SSB 5412 – Statutory Benchmarks and Performance Measures, SB 5979 – Transportation Innovative Partnerships, SHB 2358 – Ferry Fare Setting and Operational Practices and companion bill ESSB 6127 (these two bills have significant policy setting differences that impact the Commission), SB 5264 – Naming Transportation Facilities and ESB 6120 – Rail Study Implementation.

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, Transportation Commission (WSTC), provided a detailed overview of bills having a direct impact to the Commission. He referenced several bills that did not move forward.

LONG-TERM AIR TRANSPORTATION STUDY (LATS) AND PLANNING COUNCIL

John Shambaugh, LATS Project Manager, Aviation Division, WSDOT, provided a brief overview of the programs within the division. He moved on to provide an update on the Long-Term Air Transportation Study (LATS). The states' recognizes that its interest is in the preservation of aviation facilities and services that provide access to national transportation systems that support local economies, that transportation by air is safe and that capacity exists to respond to growth, demand and access across the state, nation and the world, and to lessen negative environmental impacts of airports on people and nature. The LATS Study was authorized by the Legislature to determine current capacity and what will be needed to meet future demands to 2030. LATS has three phases; phase I assess what we have, phase II assess what we need and phase III will provide recommendations for future airport strategies and statewide investments. Phase I has been completed and Phase II is in progress with two regional meetings scheduled on the east and west side of the state in Spring 2007.

For further information on LATs you may visit: www.wsdot.wa.gov/aviation/LATS.htm.

TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE – TOLL DISCUSSION

Greg Selstead, Director, Tolling Operations and David Pope, TNB Toll Systems Manager, WSDOT, provided a presentation that included comparable cost of tolling operations as they apply to the TNB along with a revised timeline for the toll rate setting process and photo enforcement. Mr. Pope explained that there will be two types of toll collection on the TNB – manual toll (stop and pay at the toll booth) and electronic toll collection (ETC) non-stop, transponder based that is linked to a customer account. A contractor will provide toll collection operations (hardware and software) that will include the collection of tolls at the booths, provide customer service, establish transponder accounts, respond to customer questions, facility maintenance and staff the customer service center. The Department researched operations costs, oversight roles and organizational structures of other tolled facilities across the nation. There were many variations with no toll facility being an exact match for the TNB. Many agencies have oversight roles which vary based on contractors' functions for each facility. It was difficult to compare costs of other facilities, but TNB estimated costs are comparable to others. The estimated 55 percent ETC penetration rate for TNB is higher than some of the other tolled facilities, but not unreasonable. All agencies are staffed to provide oversight of the operations contractor. Mr. Pope stepped the Commission through a comparative analysis of toll facilities operational costs.

Chair Ford emphasized that today's presentation is to open discussion of the impact of different toll collection practices on other facilities across the nation, and how these might compare to the estimates of the cost of toll operations and maintenance of the TNB.

Mr. Pope noted that moving forward all the costs will be looked at closer to determine if it is matching with expectations. Commissioners and Mr. Pope discussed the costs of enforcement for toll violators. At this point the cost and revenues are being defined.

Commissioner Distler commented that given the information and the uncertainty of the quality of the numbers provided, best guess is that the numbers are in the ballpark. He emphasized that the public and the Legislature needs to be aware that there are uncertainties regarding the percentage of ETC users and total traffic on the bridge. Regardless of which iteration is used, it is still a planning assumption – not an obligation. Until the bridge opens and there is a year or more of data, the range of possibilities is broad.

Chair Ford requested that the Department prepare draft WAC language that does not reference the exact dollar amount of the toll for Commission review. The WAC rule filing process and scheduling a meeting with the Citizen Advisory Committee and public hearing dates were discussed at length. It was determined that it would be best to wait until the end of the Legislative session to move forward with finalizing the dollar amount of the toll on the bridge.

COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, WSTC, provided an overview of the Governor's Climate Change Initiative. In February 2007, the Governor's of Arizona, California, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington announced the formation of the Western Regional Climate Action Initiative to implement a joint strategy to reduce green house gas emissions. The five states will work together to develop a regional target for reducing greenhouse gases and a market

based program to reach that target. Today's presentation is to begin Commission discussion regarding its role in responding to climate change. Governor Gregoire has proposed that goals to reach by 2020 and 2035 for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that may involve changes in transportation planning and management. Washington has already taken major steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that will move it 60 percent of the way toward the 2020 greenhouse gas goal. Several Washington cities have also adopted resolutions and taken other actions to change their policies and practices to reduce greenhouse gases. Plans indicate that a significant amount of greenhouse gas reduction must come from the transportation sector to achieve reduced emissions. The Commission should consider engaging in the effort led by the Department of Ecology and the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development to develop policies and strategies to implement the Washington Climate Change Challenge.

Chair Ford suggested that a letter be sent to the Governor and the Senate Transportation Committee extending the Commission's interest in participating in this effort. A forum might be considered as potential outreach.

Commissioner O'Neal indicated that he is supportive of the Commission taking an active role in the discussion and should possibly consider a study to assemble data and information.

Commissioner Stedman expressed that the Commission must clearly define its role before moving forward.

Mr. Parker broached the subject of the Commission's support of the USDOT Corridors of the Future. He explained that the entire Interstate 5 corridor is the preferred recommendation as opposed to only portions of the corridor within Oregon, Washington and California. All three states are working together to come to agreement on a proposal.

THE GMA CONCURRENCY GOAL AND THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Brian Smith, Director, Strategic Planning and Programming and Elizabeth Robbins, Manager, Policy Development and Regional Coordination, Transportation Planning Office, WSDOT, briefed the Commission regarding the Growth Management ACT (GMA). In 2006, the Legislature funded an analysis of expanding the GMA transportation concurrency requirement to state highways and ferry routes. The objective of the analysis was to determine how to ensure jurisdictional divisions do not defeat GMA concurrency goals.

Concurrency requires the timely provision of infrastructure to adequately serve new development. The provision of that infrastructure requires coordinated planning, sufficient funding, and adequate governance systems. The Department determined to examine concurrency within the broader context of the planning, funding and governance tools available to address the adverse impacts of local land use decisions on the state transportation system. It was found that there are gaps in law and practices that impede the achievement of the GMA concurrency goals. Next steps in the analysis were to develop a list of potential policy options to address the identified gaps.

Miss Robbins explained that transportation facilities are subject to a statutorily defined concurrency requirement not specified for other public facilities and services. Local governments are required to set level of service standards, or minimum benchmarks of performance, for transportation facilities and services. A common misconception is that concurrency guarantees some uniform minimum level of governmental services. The state has not specified any such minimums. Local governments have the authority and responsibility to set acceptable levels of service for their communities resulting in a wide variety of methodologies and standards. Local governments may not craft exemptions of any kind to avoid the concurrency requirements. When initially enacted, the transportation concurrency requirement was silent on the treatment of state-owned facilities. Due to the confusion and inconsistency in 1998 the Legislature amended the Act to require local governments to include in their plans an inventory of state-owned transportation facilities, estimate traffic impacts to those facilities resulting from their land use assumptions, list state transportation system improvements needed to meet demand, and adopt level of service standards for state-owned highways. Second, it required the Transportation Commission to establish, and the Legislature to adopt a list of Highways of Statewide Significance (HSS). The Legislature has declared approximately half of the state's highway system to be of statewide significance. Not addressed in concurrency are state-owned facilities that are not of statewide significance. There have been some unsuccessful attempts to interpret other sections of the GMA to imply a duty for local governments to coordinate more closely with the state in their transportation planning. The coordination of state, regional and local transportation planning, sufficient funding, and adequate governance systems are three key factors in the effective provision of transportation system improvement in Washington.

Ms. Robbins emphasized that the Senate Transportation Committee is very interested in moving forward with this conversation. She believes that there will be some sort of action take place to move this forward.

COUNTY ROAD PRESERVATION

Jeff Monsen, Intergovernmental Policy Manager, County Road Administration Board (CRAB), explained that the objective of today's presentation is to discuss the relationships between components of the transportation system and factors that lead to county roadway management decisions. Concurrency is what preservation of the transportation infrastructure is all about.

He explained that the daily driver does not see the difference between jurisdictions. Their focus is primarily on the need for inter-connection with the expectation of a quality level of service. The County road system provides significant alternate routes for the state highway system and is the only travel option for many users. The County road system preservation plan applies to all pavement types as well as unpaved dirt or gravel roads. The level of preservation on a road is dependent upon its primary purpose, which then determines whether the need is to preserve or improve the roadway. This decision then becomes a technical versus financial competition that may also include safety issues. He touched on preservation and rehabilitation of pavements based on structure life cycles and the associated costs. In closing he emphasized that there must be concurrency to meet the transportation system demands.

Chair Ford indicated that there should be ongoing discussion regarding decision making policies and practices for rail and roads, and getting the product to market.

SEISMIC ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

Timothy J. Walsh, Chief Geologist, Hazards Section, Washington Geological Survey, Division of Geology and Earth Resources, provided an overview of a Western Washington hazard assessment focusing primarily on earthquakes that appear on crustal faults. These faults create shallow earthquakes that are much more intense and cause extensive damage. There is new research on the Southern Whidbey Island and Seattle faults indicating activity. New techniques have been developed over the last ten years that help with the study of these faults. This research tells us that these faults are longer than previously assessed and that the size of the earthquake that can be generated is greater than previously shown in a 2002 seismic hazard map. The South Whidbey Island fault could potentially generate a 7.5 magnitude quake. Earthquakes of this magnitude are very relevant to large structures such as the Alaskan Way Viaduct and SR 520 Bridge. The Seattle fault moves along soft ground that can liquefy or amplify during an earthquake. It is not certain exactly where the fault lies because of landfill throughout the area. The known is that the fault comes into Elliott Bay, but its course after that is unknown. There is a good chance that these faults are somewhere near the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the SR 520 Bridge. He commented that it is very difficult to design a structure in the area, such as a tunnel or bridge that would withstand a substantial seismic or tsunami event. There is a potential for a tsunami in Lake Washington resulting from a seismic event that uplifts the lake floor thereby creating large landslides. He provided an overview of eight seismic events over the last three thousand years that make these hazards relevant to consider.

TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES OF SMALL PORTS IN GROWING COMMUNITIES – PORT OF RIDGEFIELD

Brent Grening, Executive Director and Commissioner Joe Melroy, Port of Ridgefield, explained that the Port encompasses 57 square miles. It is a stand alone special purpose government and is not part of city or county government. As more people move into the area, the need for public services is increasing. The Port is working to reduce the amount of taxes that the public pays to support these services by attracting top-notch private sector employers into the area. Bringing business into the area will generate tax revenue that can reduce the amount of taxes that the public pays. The benefits of lower tax rates, quality jobs and better wages have a ripple effect in the community. Port projects include retail, office and manufacturing industrial park development plans, a mixed use waterfront development, a new rail overpass that will provide better access to a local wildlife refuge on Lake River and a new I-5/Pioneer Street Interchange. There are transportation concerns that include freight mobility, rail, I-5 access, traffic congestion and safety.

LAKE WASHINGTON URBAN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT APPLICATION

Brian Smith, Director, Strategic Planning and Programming and Shuming Yan, Technical Services Manager, Urban Planning Office, WSDOT. Mr. Smith explained that the Lake Washington Urban Partnership is an effort underway that has grown from the Commission's Tolling Study. In early December 2006 the Department, PSRC and King County discussed applying for an Urban Partnership Agreement with the USDOT.

The discussion has now morphed into what now is the Lake Washington Urban Partnership. The agreement is a major component of the USDOT “National Strategy to Reduce Congestion” on the transportation network. The purpose is to give the use of value pricing a boost in the United States as a congestion management tool. There are three existing grant programs amounting to about \$130 million with additional funding amounting to \$175 million from the President for the Urban Partnership Program that could be available over the next two years. USDOT is flexible with regards to how the funds are awarded. Favorable consideration is given if the request is for the ability to toll existing interstate facilities. The partnership is a two-way street with the federal government providing funding assistance and the metropolitan area entering into the partnership must commit to pursuing an aggressive congestion management strategy that includes four elements; tolling, technology, transit and telecommuting. The program asks that that within two to three years the metropolitan area demonstrate a congestion pricing or tolling element on an existing facility that results in measurable congestion reduction. A collective proposal is being put together that will meet the qualifying guidelines.

Commissioner Distler expressed that he would support a joint value pricing tolling scheme that could be used to fund a significant portion of the SR 520 Bridge and also be used to manage traffic flows across the bridge in a unique and clever way. This supports the Commission’s Tolling Study.

Chair Ford suggested that the Commission support this effort. Commissioners were all supportive of applying for the funding.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Meta Heller, citizen, shared her vision of posters for parks.

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner reports were deferred.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m., on March 21, 2007.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

ELMIRA FORNER, Vice-Chair

EDWARD BARNES, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Member

DALE STEDMAN, Member

DOUGLAS MACDONALD, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Governor's Office

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL